

Ripper Takes Rasheed Island

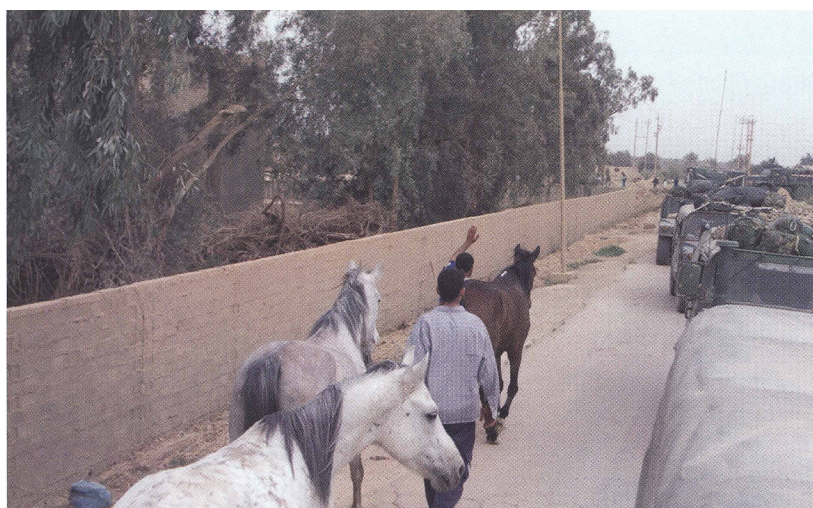


A hasty conference with RCT-7 near the Tuwaitha nuclear research facility.

RCT-7 began to prosecute the objectives inside the Rasheed complex. 'Rasheed Island' was a sprawling military and industrial complex approximately 6 km on a side. It was bounded by the Tigris River on the west, the Diyala River on the east and south, and isolated by Highway 5 and a perimeter wall/fence to the north. The complex included an airfield, which had contained the Iraqi's alleged suicide helicopter fleet (and potentially chemical weapons.) In addition to the airfield and the nearby military garrison, there were munitions factories, military storage facilities, a Special Security Office

(SSO) prison, a medical complex, and several military prisons which had reportedly held US POWs at one time or another. The Rasheed complex had been the subject of a tremendous shaping effort, and now little conventional resistance remained. Identifying and securing these various sites on the ground would prove a time consuming task.

Throughout the day, RCT-7 continued to flow across the river, with 1/7 moving across the southern bridge and 3/7 following 1st Tanks over the northern bridge. After crossing the bridge, 1/7 oriented and attacked to the southwest, clearing that corner of the Rasheed complex, while 3/4 continued to drive northwest to the limits of the zone. First Tanks attacked and seized the Al Rasheed airfield, and 3/7 passed through them to attack along the northern flank of the RCT's zone to the edge of the complex. There, the battalion cleared the Rasheed Medical Facility, which reportedly was used to house American POWs. Upon arrival at the facility, 3/7 found no



Horses from the Rasheed Military Stables run through the streets of Baghdad.

American prisoners, but found uniform items that belonged to US soldiers captured by the Iraqis early in the war. Continuing the attack, 3/7 cleared another suspected SSO facility on Rasheed. The battalion found no American POWs here either, but did find a semi-trailer full of decomposing Iraqi bodies. The apparent victims of the Regime each had at least one bullet hole in the head.

By the evening, RCT-7 had secured the entire Rasheed complex, and was prepared to continue the attack into the rest of Baghdad. The RCT-7 Main and TAC were now collocated at the Rasheed Airfield. Upon further inspection of its area upon occupation, RCT-7 discovered hundreds of crates of 122mm rocket ammunition buried under 15 foot high dirt mounds. The S2, Major Ron Spears, found top secret communications documents in the back of a disabled communications truck. At the south bridge, 8th ESB completed the Medium Girder Bridge, and the Division Forward CP moved up to Rasheed, setting up in the stadium of a Fedeyeen training facility, and preparing to take control of the attack into Baghdad proper.



Engineers emplace a ribbon bridge over the Diyala River to speed the attack.

Near the Tuwaitha nuclear facility, recently vacated by 1/7 and turned over to the Combat Engineer Battalion, Marines investigated an Iraqi 'yellowcake' site and found it wide open, with extremely high, unsafe radiation readings. Yellowcake is the raw form of uranium, and a great deal of it had been stored at this facility. In areas not yet under the control of the RCT, local civilians had looted the storage facilities and taken barrels of unenriched uranium away (just for the metal barrels themselves.) Recognizing the obvious health hazard to local citizens who did not understand the radiation threat, the Combat Engineers closed off the site and marked it with NATO hazardous area signs. A team was

called forward to conduct detailed site exploitation and to handle the risk posed. Both the yellowcake and Tuwaitha facilities were secured until they were turned over to the relieving force, the US 2^d Armored Cavalry Regiment.

Inchon Is In

While RCT-7 attacked through the sparsely populated military-industrial complex, RCT-1 began the difficult task of pushing through the dense urban neighborhoods of eastern Baghdad. RCT-1 continued to make slow progress through the course of the day, meeting moderate resistance from snipers and mortar attacks. The remaining resistance in zone was concentrated in schools and mosques, complicating the targeting process. The amount of mortar fire remained high, as 11th Marines registered 39 counter-battery radar acquisitions. Of these, most were passed to the DASC for aviation attack, or were not fired at all. At this point in the fight, returning unobserved indirect fire into the urban area was no longer necessary, and the risk of Iraqi civilians becoming injured or killed was too great. Once again, the Marines quickly adjusted their engagement criteria, sparing innocent lives in the process. The enemy's reckless, but generally ineffective, indirect fires out of and into civilian neighborhoods did not goad the Marines into returning fire where it could be avoided. Division Marines, operating in accordance with their 'No better friend, no worse enemy' credo, gave the Iraqi people every reason to

welcome Coalition forces, not fight them. The superior fire discipline practiced by the Marines carefully discriminated between enemy and innocents, demonstrating to the Iraqi people that the real enemy was the Regime and those loyal to it.



Marines press the attack into the urban areas of Baghdad.

Once both RCT-1 and RCT-7 were across the river, the main effort switched to the Inchon Marines as they attacked to create enough maneuver space for both themselves and RCT-5. The RCT attacked with two battalions abreast, with 1/4 attacking northwest along the Army Canal and 3/1 attacking on 1/4's right flank. The two-battalion front extended the RCT zone all the way to the abandoned canal on the outskirts of Baghdad. First Battalion was tasked to seize the Highway 5 bridge across the Abandoned Canal. Bravo Company, 1/4, under Captain Paul Gomez, was ordered to secure the

bridge to deny access into the zone. Alpha Company, under Captain Chris Griffin, attacked abreast of Bravo as a supporting effort to clear in zone to the Abandoned Canal. Charlie Company, 1/4, maintained security at the river-crossing site.

As Bravo Company approached the bridge, they started to receive sporadic small arms fire. The lead platoon crossed the bridge and soon realized that the company had overshot its objective area and was in Grizzly's zone. The enemy waited until almost the entire company had crossed the bridge before initiating a coordinated ambush with machinegun and RPG fire. At least five RPGs were fired, along with a heavy volume of machinegun fire. First Lieutenant Dallas Shaw, Bravo Company Executive Officer, made a critical decision to turn his AAV into the rear of the ambush instead of back across the bridge. There, he found several Fedeyeen preparing to assault the rear of the company column. He immediately charged, leading the Marines in his AAV against this enemy force, killing at least three and disrupting the would-be ambush, and the company was able to cross back over the bridge into its proper objective area. During this contact, Corporal Christopher Linck, a sniper attached to Bravo Company, was struck in the neck by gunfire as he was suppressing the enemy located in the buildings. Alpha Company dispatched a platoon to locate a suitable LZ to support a CASEVAC, and helicopters made their way into the zone.

Meanwhile, the platoon blocking the bridge continued to receive a heavy volume of fire from across the bridge. As Captain Moran was working to receive approval for cross-boundary fires into Grizzly's zone, Private First Class Juan Garza Jr. was mortally wounded by an Iraqi sniper hiding in a civilian house. Private First Class Garza had been part of the RCT's attack to liberate

these oppressed Shia neighborhoods from the last remnants of the Regime. Bitter at the loss of one of their own, RCT-1 worked against the sniper, finding that many of these last remaining fighters were well trained and very capable. It was a sobering first-hand introduction to the difficulties in fighting in MOUT. Had the Regime and foreign fighters been able to rally popular support using the ammunition supply points and weapons caches in the schools and mosques, there may have been significantly more Coalition casualties.

As the Marines from Bravo Company continued to gain ground in the town, Major Casado (the 1/4 Operations Officer) ordered a platoon from Alpha Tanks to reinforce Bravo Company.



Blue Diamond Marines continue to roll into Baghdad.

Bravo Company's fire support team called-in accurate artillery missions, while the tanks unleashed devastatingly precise main gunfire. This deadly combination destroyed two enemy bunkers, and effectively ended enemy fires directed at Bravo Company. The Marines of

RCT-1 cleared the town, killing several enemy fighters and capturing a significant amount of weapons and ordnance and EPWs, to include a two-star general. RCT-1 stood poised to continue the attack towards Saddam City.

Grizzly Goes Long

RCT-5's columns wound their way through the narrow avenues of approach to the river crossings, and crossed the river. RCT-5 used the same combination of bridges and fording sites that RCT-1 did to get across. Once on the western side of the Diyala, RCT-5 continued its advance north along the bank of the river. After passing north behind RCT-1's front lines all the way to the old abandoned canal on the northeast edge of Baghdad, RCT-5 turned west and began its attack in its own zone on the right flank of RCT-1. Third Battalion, 5th Marines, led the attack across the canal, pushing to the east to uncover the ground to the west bank of the Diyala River. Lieutenant Colonel Fred Padilla's 1/5 followed, clearing the ground to the west. In this suburban area, the RCT immediately experienced significant resistance from Fedeyeen snipers, and triggered a number of RPG ambushes. RCT-5 successfully fought through each enemy attack, eliminating the threat. The RCT was to come under a significant number of mortar attacks, but these were poorly aimed and ineffective. Like in previous areas, once the Fedeyeen had been cleared out, the local populace returned to the streets, welcoming the Marines with cheers and waves. For this and other areas of the capitol, the 'Three Block War' was often fought on a single block, only over three time periods in a single day. The Marines found themselves in intense combat in the morning, followed by deterrence of factional fighting at noon, and ending

with the smiles and waves of the citizens as they entered the streets without fear, many for the first time in their young lives.

With 3/5 and 1/5 consolidating north of the Abandoned Canal, RCT-5's plan called for Lieutenant Colonel Dan O'Donohue's 2/5 to attack across the north side of Baghdad to establish a blocking position along Highway 2 to complete the cordon of the city. Just north of Saddam City, however, the battalion encountered stiff resistance from Fedeyeen and other irregular forces, fighting from prepared positions. The enemy seemed surprised as to the direction and timing of the attack and 2/5 skillfully employed 3^d MAW aviation and direct fires to exact a heavy toll on them. With large numbers of enemy reinforcements moving from the built up areas of Saddam City into the restrictive terrain ahead of the battalion, the decision was made to seek an alternate route to the Highway 2 objective. The battalion returned to Highway 5 and sought a bypass of the poor terrain at the north end of the city. By the evening of 8 April, 2/5 had made its way on a roundabout 55 km detour around the north side of the city, and established a blocking position astride Highway 2. Once 2/5 was in position, the Regimental CP followed, and shifted the headquarters of RCT-5 to the far northwestern edge of the Division's zone. The city was now surrounded, with Marines to the east and north, and Soldiers of the US 3^d Infantry Division (on the west side of the Tigris River) generally west and south.

Adventures on the Screen

On the Division's flanks, 2^d and 3^d LAR Battalions continued their security zone operations. Wolfpack Battalion extended their screen line into the zones vacated by RCT-1 and RCT-5. The Wolfpack now patrolled the entire eastern edge of the city all the way to the Tigris (a zone 45 km in length) while Barbarian continued to secure the critical Highway 6 route all the way back to the Tigris River crossings. This area included the critical airfields at Salman Pak East and An Numaniyah, where much needed food and ammunition were being flown by 3^d MAW to sustain the Division's attack.

Over the course of days, there had been numerous reports of ongoing enemy activity in Baqubah to the north of Baghdad. This had been the site of the Al Nida Division headquarters and one of its combat brigades. Although the garrisons were thought to have been abandoned, it was necessary to send a ground force to assess the threat to the Division's northeast flank. The Reconnaissance Battalion, having collocated with the Division Main CP on the east side of the Diyala River, received the order to attack to Baqubah, to establish a security zone to the north and east. The Al Nida Division's 41st Brigade had been located in Baqubah, and it was not clear what level of resistance remained in the city from conventional or paramilitary forces. The Battalion was to conduct an advance on the eastern road (5 km to the east of the Diyala River) to Baqubah and began to roll at sunset on 8 April.

Reconnaissance Battalion's Attack to Baqubah

In the late evening hours, the Reconnaissance Battalion, with Charlie Company of 1st LAR Battalion attached, approached the Baqubah area. When they were still 17 km south of the city, the lead LAVs began to receive fires from either side of the road. The enemy was arrayed in depth to make the entire roadway one continuous engagement area. Air was called, but the

visibility was very poor due to fog and well-concealed positions occupied by the defenders. Recon Battalion pushed flanking patrols on either side of the ambush, attempting to turn the defenders out of their fixed positions, but the enemy had pre-registered mortars on these routes to their flank, and successfully kept the flanking patrols suppressed. The enemy began to adjust their mortar fire on to the LAVs who were by this time returning fire from the road, and forced them to pull back out of the kill zone. These skilled resistors were likely Republican Guardsmen of the Al Nida Division, but were all dressed in civilian clothes. Recon Battalion continued to suppress the defenders with 81mm mortars while they waited for daylight to continue the attack. When the battalion decided to engage again at first light, it found these positions vacated.

With the Division's successful attack across the Diyala, the Division found itself in possession of a significant portion of eastern Baghdad already. By establishing a cordon, the Division had closed the door for the enemy's escape, and opened the door to operations inside the city. With RCT-7 poised at the edge of downtown, and RCT-1 prepared to push into Saddam City, all of eastern Baghdad was within a few km of the Division's positions. The Division worked quickly to generate and refine a target set in the Baghdad urban area that would meet the MEF Commander's intent. With resistance crumbling, the Division was positioned to continue the attack into Baghdad now, and this list would at least give the attack some specific objectives.

On 8 April, Charlie Company, 1st LAR was attached to 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and led the attack towards Baqubah. White platoon commanded by Second Lieutenant Frank McCabe was moving up route green (Highway 5) to establish a blocking position at the 12 Northing. A light colored pickup truck was traveling towards them when it stopped 500 meters away and immediately made a u-turn upon seeing the platoon and sped away. The platoon thought they saw a heavy machine gun on the back of the vehicle but couldn't make a positive identification. As the truck continued to retreat it stopped about 2000 meters away and began to open fire on the platoon with its 12.7mm Heavy Machine Gun. White platoon immediately gave chase to the truck and closed within 750 meters of the vehicle. Second Lieutenant Paul Webber, the commander of the LAV Anti-Tank section, noticed several red streaks skimming over the ground directly toward his two lead LAVs. Second Lieutenant Webber called out the RPG contact over the radio just as the projectiles began exploding to the side of the road. At this point Second Lieutenant McCabe realized they had driven into an ambush and ordered his platoon to halt. Mortar rounds began impacting directly off to the right side of the road as small arms and light machine gun fire began erupting from the tall grass to their right flank. An RPG round impacted dangerously close to the lead LAV-25, blowing out four of its tires, and temporarily blinding Sergeant Steele, the vehicle commander. The concussion knocked him sideways tearing off the cord to his communications helmet and severing communications with the rest of the platoon. While Lieutenant McCabe watched his wingman lose control and swerve to the side of the road, he directed the rest of the platoon to pull back. He then called for an immediate suppression mission from the company's organic 81mm mortars. Sergeant Steele had regained control of his vehicle at this time and pulled back out of the engagement area. Once his wingman was clear, Lieutenant McCabe withdrew south to a safe distance and directed a Close Air Support (CAS) mission with a section of UH-1N Huey gunships. Using their rockets and guns on the enemy ambush position, the aircraft completed three attacks and fires from the enemy ceased. Charlie Company remained in their original defensive blocking position for the night.

These objectives would serve as guideposts for operations, but the real objective remained to destroy enemy fighters wherever they were holed up. There were indications that Regime forces had already vacated large portions of the city, and now these areas were being looted by civilian mobs. It was clear to all on the scene that the chaos in the city mandated an immediate attack to crush the remaining resistance and restore order. The attack could not wait any longer. Although significant pockets of resistance remained in the city, the beginning of the end of the Baghdad fight was at hand.

The first objective of CFLCC had remained the completion of the cordon, and by the end of 8 April it was finally complete. The Division had now met the cordon requirement, positioned itself for a simultaneous attack into eastern Baghdad from multiple directions, and developed its set of maneuver objectives in the city. By the morning, the Division would begin the takedown of eastern Baghdad.



The MEF Commander reviews Baghdad options with the Division Commander.

9 April Getting Permission

From the successes of all three RCTs on 8 April, the Division assessed that the conventional military threat in Baghdad was nearly eliminated. The US 3^d Infantry Division had conducted repeated raids to the gates of the presidential palace on the west side of the Tigris, and conventional resistance had been greatly reduced there as well. Only paramilitary forces and terrorists remained in eastern Baghdad, notably in the northern parts, where they still operated in company size. In the southeastern part of the city, they maintained an uncoordinated presence, operating in small groups from strongholds in mosques, schools, and safe houses. The enemy still had the ability to mass these groups in areas of continued Regime influence, but as the attack continued, the resistance from these disparate groups gradually faded away. The changing nature of the fight was apparent, even as early as 8 April. The transition from liberation to stabilization in Baghdad would be a gradual process, but had obviously begun.

During this time, the Division received notice that there was consideration at higher headquarters for instituting an operational pause, with US units positioned on the Baghdad cordon. The premise behind the pause was that there was still an organized Iraqi conventional resistance inside the city, and that there was a centralized authority that still controlled this resistance. The plan under consideration would offer this centralized authority a 72-hour period to turn over the city peacefully. From one perspective, this appeared to be a reasonable way to

gain the city of Baghdad without forcing a lengthy and costly urban attack. The reality of the situation on the ground had been changing rapidly, however, and MEF and Division assessed it quite differently. The enemy defenses had already collapsed, and the new enemy was the chaos that was beginning to permeate the city as the developing power vacuum permitted looters, vigilantes, and criminal gangs to run rampant. It was clear to the MEF and Division that the situation in Baghdad would be made more difficult by delay, not less so. The Division made its recommendations accordingly. In the early hours of 9 April, Blue Diamond gained approval for continued operations in the urban area, and launched its attack. The Division battlespace in the city was sectorized and assigned to the four Regimental headquarters (including 11th Marines). Under the Division's plan, the regimental commander would exercise authority in his zone, and quickly move to secure the public infrastructure, root out any remaining resistance, and provide a security presence on the streets. The 11th Marines commander would also have the task of providing artillery or counter-battery support as required as units cleared the city. Within 24 hours, Blue Diamond would control large segments of eastern Baghdad, and would have already begun to conduct Civil-Military Operations.

Shaking Hands Across the Tigris

There was still a significant amount of fight left in the Fedeyeen and paramilitaries of northern Baghdad. The Division was required to conduct a physical linkup with US Army forces on the other side of the Tigris, and assigned the task to RCT-5. The northern neighborhoods of Baghdad had not received the same attention by US forces that the southern neighborhoods had. Fedeyeen and other fighters remained in strong isolated pockets, making the northern side of town a dangerous place to operate. On 9 April, 2/5 fought its way through heavy resistance to the Tigris River bridges on Baghdad's north side, accomplishing the linkup with the US 3d Infantry Division forces across the river.

While 2/5 fought its way to the linkup, the rest of RCT-5 strengthened the cordon by conducting aggressive patrols in their zone. First Battalion, 5th Marines sent a patrol to investigate a prison. As the patrol approached the compound, the gate was opened. Out spilled dozens of children wearing threadbare clothing and looking undernourished. Crossing their hands as if to mimic handcuffs, they approached the Marines. Then they gave the 'thumbs up' sign and shouted their thanks. According to some of the Iraqi citizens who thronged to the site of the prison, including many overjoyed parents, the prison was for Iraqi children who had refused to join the youth branch of the Baath Party. More than one hundred children, some of whom had been imprisoned for years, spilled out of the jail when the gates were opened. The satisfaction that the Marines would experience that day left no Marine untouched, and would carry them through some hard fighting that remained in the city.

Entering the City

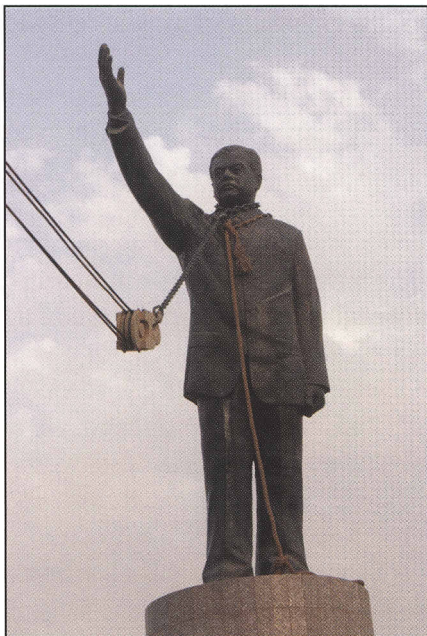
RCT-7 had been impatiently held-up at the Rasheed limit of advance for most of a day pending approval to enter the city. They now broke out of the bridgehead with enthusiasm. Their first goal was to secure their designated zone, nearly one-third of eastern Baghdad. Although the Marines had received a generally warm welcome by Iraqis up to this point in the campaign, it was nothing compared to the reception they began to receive in Baghdad. Crowds

of civilians came out to cheer on the Marines as they drove by. Chants of “Good, good!” along with a thumbs up were most common. Every Marine felt like a hero as he waved to the crowds. The stories started to quickly come out about how happy the people were to be rid of Saddam Hussein. In a letter given to the Marines, one Iraqi told his story, “...My father was an officer in the Iraqi army in the war between Iraq and Iran. After that, Saddam killed him. After that I want revenge and I want to go to the USA and to be an officer in the US Army.



Marines secure a Regime Palace east of the Tigris.

Late on the afternoon of 9 April, 1/7 moved into Baghdad. Its objectives were all located on a distinctive peninsula in central Baghdad. As the Battalion moved onto the peninsula, it was greeted by thousands of cheering Iraqis. They blew kisses, threw flowers and one man carried a sign supporting George Bush. While it was reassuring to see the people’s support, there was still work to be done. Company objectives were assigned, with Bravo Company tasked to seize Baghdad University. Bravo entered the University compound and took small arms fire that they quickly suppressed. Shortly after receiving fire, a large ammo cache of anti-aircraft rounds



A statue of Saddam moments before it was pulled down under the glare of the international media.

began to go off. The Battalion’s 81mm mortar position was receiving so much fragmentation from the cook offs that the Battalion Gunner sought to move them from their position. The mortar men refused to leave their guns, out of concern for not being able to support their fellow Marines and answer a fire mission if called. When the mortar men also received fire from a building next to their position, they formed a provisional rifle squad to clear it. This bias for action and aggressiveness characterized Marines from across the Division. The University had posed a threat to Army units in their zone across the Tigris River as well, and the Army had poured volley after volley of DPICM munitions against targets on the university grounds. The high ‘dud rate’ of these types of munitions made the grounds of the university an extreme UXO hazard to the Marines and civilians. (Colonel Mike Marletto, CO of 11th Marines and the Division's Fire Support Coordinator had wisely shifted to 'VT'-fused artillery ammunition when the Marines closed on Baghdad, limiting the DPICM dud threat in most of the Division's zone.)

Charlie Company was ordered to seize a small Regime palace in the Division zone, across the Tigris from the main Presidential Palace. Charlie conducted a deliberate clearing of

the Regime palace, finding evidence of the lavish fraud the dictator had perpetrated on the poor citizens of Iraq, but nothing of military significance. The battalion was also tasked with searching the residence of Tariq Aziz. The former Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq had his residence on the peninsula near the University. The residence was searched for intelligence documents, and many boxes of documents were retrieved for later intelligence exploitation. By that afternoon, the commander of 1/7, Lieutenant Colonel Chris Conlin, reported, "the peninsula is in my hands, and I think I can hold it."

Initially being tasked to make contact and clear the enemy in zone, Lieutenant Colonel Brian McCoy's 3/4 moved out late in the day on 9 April expecting to run into the teeth of the Baghdad defensive fortifications. Operations conducted that day were planned to be slow and deliberate, as the battalion cleared the remaining enemy defenders. Meeting far less resistance than had been expected, however, 3/4 found that it was available to execute several new orders to secure key buildings in downtown Baghdad. Among these were the Palestine Hotel, Sheraton Hotel, Baghdad Hotel, and the Embassies of Japan, Germany, the Vatican, Indonesia, and Poland (which housed the US interests section.) The battalion commander ordered India Company to secure the Palestine Hotel. The scene that greeted the advancing Marines at the traffic circle in front of the Palestine and Sheraton Hotels was crowded and chaotic, as the streets quickly filled with civilians. Members of the press, until now restricted to the Palestine Hotel by the Regime, poured out to record the moment. In the Firdos Square traffic circle, a large statue of Saddam Hussein dominated the scene. Just beyond it, the cameras of the world's press covering the war in Baghdad went live to record the moment American Marines entered downtown Baghdad. As the Marines of 3/4 approached the statue, the crowd asked the Marines to help them tear it down. It was not long before an M88 Tank Retriever was called up to help tear down the symbol of the freshly deposed dictator. Corporal Edward Chin of Bravo Company, First Tanks, draped an American flag over the statue's head in a proud display of what the Marine Corps had accomplished (causing some considerable consternation at higher echelons.) Just as quickly, the Marines replaced it with an Iraqi flag, demonstrating their commitment to the real objective of restoring Iraq to its people. To the jubilant shouts of the Iraqis, and the whirl of cameras from the international press, the statue came tumbling down. The famous 'statue incident' received the attention of every major news outlet, and signaled all that the Marines had liberated eastern Baghdad. The symbolism was lost on no one as the image was flashed around the world.

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Belcher's 3/7 also immediately set out to secure high value targets across their zone. These targets included a suspected Saddam Fedeyeen training compound, the



During the 'statue incident', this US Flag was quickly replaced by an Iraqi Flag, demonstrating the Marines' commitment to restoring freedom to Iraq.